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ABSTRACT

This paper explores "political kitsch," a propaganda that incorporates familiar and easily understood art forms to shape the direction of public policy. Kitsch differs from art in that it is a powerful political construction designed to colonize the receiver's consciousness. It reassures and comforts the receiver through the exploitation of cultural myths and readily understood symbolism, serving to pacify rather than provoke individuals. The majority of Americans are immersed in Kitsch as children, thanks to the curriculum and practices of public schools, coupled with the power of the ever-changing popular culture. These popular images remain strong in the collective psyche. One example is that of the image of women as the embodiment of weakness and sexuality, the so-called "Hester Prynne" construction, a reference to the protagonist in "The Scarlet Letter." This myth was successfully manipulated in politics to create the fictional "welfare queen": single mothers who manipulated the system to achieve a life of ease and reproduction. Another prominent myth in the culture of Kitsch is that of children in need of being "fixed." This motivates much of school reform where repeated calls for a pristine past to rightly educate children fuels much of the reform debate. (RJM)

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POLITICAL KITSCH AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY

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Kitsch

> Those who find the word "orphanages" objectionable may think of them as 24-hour-a-day preschools.–Charles Murray[1]

In early 1995, the new Republican speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, proposed a radical retrenchment of the American welfare state. Much of his argument was based upon the claim that private charitable agencies were far more capable of ameliorating societal ills than was the federal government. To bolster his rhetorical point, Gingrich cited the effectiveness of "Boys Town" in helping troubled children. But the "Boys Town" Gingrich invoked was not the Catholic charity in Nebraska, but a sentimental movie made nearly sixty years ago. While a very small portion of the US populace was familiar with the actual institution, thanks to television, most were aware of the movie and the syrupy emotions it engendered. Blithely ignoring a host of structural and brutal economic inequalities that endangered so many American children, Gingrich neatly substituted a corny cultural condensation symbol for historical reality and subsequently attempted to build political support for his controversial policy proposals. Put differently, the honorable speaker was indulging in what can be termed "Political Kitsch."

Political Kitsch is a type of propaganda that incorporates familiar and *easily* understood art forms (Kitsch) to shape the direction of public policy. Kitsch is something readily accessible in everyday life; a complex symbol–a referent that draws upon a given history and culture–that carries both information and emotional import. The admittedly obscure origins of the term "Kitsch" are found in the art world.[2] The German word implies an artistic creation that "makes use of refuse taken bodily from the rubbish dump."[3] Kitsch has also been described as "art that sentimentalizes everyday experiences, or that appeals to beliefs and emotions encouraging vanity, prejudices, or unjustified fears and dubious successes."[4] While Kitsch can be occasionally disturbing, it is more likely to reassure and comfort the observer. Manufacturers of Kitsch are aware of a given audience's cultural biases and deliberately exploit them. Kitsch is art that engages the emotions and deliberately ignores the intellect, and as such, is a form of cultural anesthesia. It is this ability to build and exploit cultural myths–and to easily manipulate conflicted history–that makes Kitsch a powerful political construction.

Its facile use of symbolism also gives Kitsch immense political utility. Kitsch can simultaneously provide comfort and reinforce a host of national mythologies. It has an immediacy that other art, which isn't Kitsch, must avoid. Art creates a sense of distance between the viewer and the object (whether it is music, painting sculpture, theater, etc.), and then demands that the viewer span that distance following subtle cues in making the aesthetic leap.[5] This leap can become a gaping chasm to those accustomed to routine patterns and forms, and who are disconcerted by unexpected twists and turns along a given artistic path. What makes Kitsch "Kitsch" is that it is simple and predictable. There are no aesthetic leaps and there are very few, if any, surprises. For example, in most movies and television shows we expect that the "good guys" will "win," whatever that means. Many people become irate when the plot turns out otherwise, with some individuals taking great pains to denounce those

programs which deviate from the path of Kitsch, as menacing the moral fiber of American society.

All art has a politics to it, for an artist builds upon and plays with the receiver's various senses of histories, cultures, and realities.[6] Art portrays relations between individuals, groups, and even between inanimate objects. Instead of representing reality, "art *creates* realities and worlds."[7] It is important to make this distinction between what is art and what is "real." . Art invades people's sense of being to literally play with their minds. It weaves through a person's consciousness, occasionally teasing, reaffirming, jolting, disturbing, challenging, and pulling those threads of deeply held convictions and beliefs. Art exploits various cultural norms through a creative use of symbolism to provide the receiver with differing perspectives and insights. Perception can be radically shifted and abstracted. Some art is, by design, profoundly offensive to pedestrian sensibilities, yet by its artistic merit, great art. One need only to think of Dadaist paintings or Frank Zappa's early compositions to realize that both deliberately mixed and distorted various symbols to provide the receiver with vastly altered perceptions of 20th century bourgeois culture.[8] That both genres simultaneously tweaked the political status quo lent credence to the charges of subversion.

Art engages both the intellect and emotions by shifting a person's sense of what "is real." For this perceptual shift to occur, artists must step free from the conventional constructed political categories of reality, full of hoary and simplistic symbolism, to create works of art.[9] Since artists consciously construct a multitude of realities, they can subvert what were once considered hard and fast categories of acceptable social and political behavior. Notions of exactly who are considered society's heroes and who are its villains become quickly scrambled. This subversive power makes artists and their creations potentially threatening to a given political regime. In authoritarian countries, great artists tend to be in danger of coercion, repression, imprisonment, and on occasion, death, as was the case in the Stalinist Soviet Union.[10] In more democratic settings such as the US, rancorous debates swirl around the governmental funding of art, and what various art forms reveal concerning the moral health of the nation. Typically, social conservatives declare that government has no business funding either "offensive" art or our seemingly endless collection of thoroughly debauched artists.

Yet, when charges of fueling moral turpitude are leveled, it is not the art itself, but the political implications behind most "subversive" art that defenders of tradition find threatening to their sense of order. And they are right to be worried. Good art *should be* politically subversive, in that it plays with our sense of what is "real," however subtly. It must disturb and intrigue by provoking both curiosity and emotion. What social conservatives wish to fund is profoundly different from, perhaps antithetical to, art. Like their old communist antagonists, the keepers of "American traditional values" long for docile propagandists to create politically comfortable and useful Kitsch.

Kitsch differs from art in that it is a powerful political construction designed to colonize the receiver's consciousness. As such, Kitsch is the beautiful lie.[11] It reassures and comforts the receiver through the exploitation of cultural myths and readily understood symbolism.[12] But Kitsch neither challenges nor subverts the larger social order. Kitsch must pacify, not provoke the general public. The political status quo must be legitimated and

upheld as morally superior. In a more obvious political setting, a veritable pastiche of Kitsch is presented to the American public every four years in the form of the grand and glorious "Presidential Campaign." Candidates are "sold" to a television public through a carefully tailored and sophisticated use of political Kitsch. Various national symbols and art forms are woven together in the hopes of plying patriotism for electoral triumph.

This political utility of Kitsch can also blur the distinction between "Art" and "Kitsch." Works of art can be colonized to function as political Kitsch since they provide readily identifiable images which are subsequently employed to soothe a worried populace and/or sell a given product including Presidents–see the 1992 Clinton campaign's use of *Fleetwood Mac*. Rock music seems particularly vulnerable to political Kitsch, thanks to enormous economic buying power of the baby boom generation coupled with a sentimental longing for their "good old days" (the 1960s & 1970s). One example of this "Kitsching" is the ad campaign for Chevy Trucks, which has rock musician Bob Seger's ballad "Like a Rock" playing in the background The function of this colonized music is to peddle pick-up trucks via a not-too-hip, but familiar macho symbol, to aging (saggin?) baby-boomers.[13]

Other examples of political Kitsch abound thanks to public schooling, mass marketing, the ubiquitousness of television, and to a lesser extent, popular movies.[14] Programs like "The Lawrence Welk Show," "Father Knows Best," "Leave it to Beaver," and the film "Forrest Gump," are obvious Kitsch, and all play to homey American certitudes. These have more to do with invoking and manipulating comfortable myths dear to the hearts of many Americans (including white supremacy, patriarchy, the power of vague Protestantism, and the inherent nobility of the monied classes), rather than reflecting their lived individual or collective experiences.

While the first three examples of Kitsch are uncontroversial, largely due to the passage of time, "Forrest Gump's" inclusion may provoke some protestations to the contrary. There are numerous aspects of Kitsch in "Gump," but one is particularly striking. As opposed to the movie character, real-life Gumps were almost instant cannon fodder for the Pentagon during the Vietnam War. By the late 1960s, the US military deliberately recruited men with sub-normal IQ's, some as low as 62, for the Southeast Asian meat-grinder. Hopelessly ill-equipped to deal with warfare and despised by their comrades in arms, most of these men were quickly slaughtered.[15] The movie "Forrest Gump," provides a stunning contrast to reality by invoking the ancient myth that simple nobility of character was what was needed not only to survive (even if shot in the buttocks), but to triumph.[16] One is left with a very distorted notion of the Vietnam war: "Golly Beave, if only the US had had more 'Gumps' we might have won that nasty little war." The reality faced by real-life Gumps is that they were real dead, real fast, and the US, like the French colonialists before them, had little chance of prevailing. This cultivated belief in the nobility of war–even the wrenching Vietnam War–was played to great rhetorical effect by President Reagan to build support for highly controversial foreign and domestic policies. The "nobel cause" is one form of political Kitsch. It creates and reinforces myths while limiting the terms of acceptable debate.

Political "Kitsch" depends upon easily invoked cultural symbols to address complex political dilemmas and limit analysis. On first blush, Kitsch would appear to lend itself to political conservatives, yet self-declared radicals and even nominal liberals (or moderates) can

also find it very useful in shaping and limiting the terms of discussion. In an article entitled "The Bob Newhart Test" columnist Meg Greenfield establishes a method of determining the relative value of federal programs based upon a comedy routine by Bob Newhart. As she explains "Newhart could expose the essentially crazy nature of any cherished national custom, institution or idea simply by causing it to explained in its own terms to someone who presumably had not heard of it before."[17] Greenfield's unstated assumption is that while her readers may be unfamiliar with Newhart's specific monologue, we've all seen "The Bob Newhart Show." The "Bob Test" provides Greenfield with a method of "reducing over-elaborate subjects to their true outlines."[18] It offers an end run around all of that messy social scientific data supposedly clogging our public policy debates.[19]

But does it? It can be argued that the "Bob Test" flunks as a possible public policy tool thanks to its inherent "Kitschiness." Bob Newhart, the real human being, has made a very profitable career by appealing to white, straight, middle-class Americans, by adroitly playing off a host of their cultural assumptions. Newhart plays the supposedly gentle goof, the nice guy who spends his life endlessly trying to figure out how to deal with difference. He doesn't have to reject his sense of power or entitlement. Newhart merely assumes an updated comic version of the "White Man's Burden" that has been a staple of American television sit-coms since the 1950s. By focusing upon the "quirkiness" of other people and not his own assumptions, Newhart sets himself up to be the proto-typical nice-guy, ostensibly liberal, just trying to cope with social change. But ultimately, he misses the point. If Greenfield thinks the "Bob Test" is an elegant and appropriate policy tool other models should also suffice; such as the "Whoopi Goldberg Test," "Pee Wee Herman Test," or the "Susan Westenhoffer Test." Yet, it is doubtful Greenfield would find these nearly as amenable.

This power of Kitsch, the political use of mundane, corny and "safe" art (and the symbols therein) for shaping and limiting the public policy arena is the focus of this book. In the United States, appreciation for Kitsch is cultivated rather early by public schooling–which is free, compulsory, and all too frequently, mind-numbing–and a host of other social and political institutions. It is then reinforced through a host of cultural vehicles, perhaps the most powerful being television. We are continually bombarded with symbolic references through advertising, programming, and news broadcasts. One can't help but be impressed by the power that symbols and symbolic forms have in people's lives, shaping an individual's consciousness and/or soul, and spurring or thwarting collective political action. As Edelman has observed, "Symbols become that facet of experiencing the material world that gives it a specific meaning,"[20] whether or not that meaning is grounded in fact.

Some Theoretical Concerns

The study of symbolism has been the province of philosophy, theology, psychology and aesthetics, with research focused upon individuals and their responses. Yet, such lines of disciplinary demarcation are easily blurred since symbols are also critical to the political process and have saliency well beyond the individual. Political organizations and activists go to great lengths to coin slogans, design banners and logos, and invent songs based on readily invoked (and manipulated) cultural symbolism. Those seeking power need more than just individual response to attain their political goals. They use symbols to incite massive action

and/or quiescence.[21] Obviously, symbols carry political implications for groups of people, in addition to individuals.

Learning political symbols is the most rudimentary forms of socialization, beginning in the early elementary grades.[22] This was once a rich area of academic inquiry. Yet several prominent educational policy scholars have lamented the dramatic decline in research addressing *political socialization*,[23] or how individuals learn to become citizens within a given political system.[24] Ironically, research regarding this question has not diminished, as much as the "style" and focus has changed. Scholars of various disciplinary stripes have concerned themselves with how individuals learn politics and their respective roles within the political system through a multitude of educational and, all too often, *mis*educational sites. But such research now tends to be framed in terms of hegemony, resistance, and emancipatory praxis, rather than civic instruction. It's not that research examining political socialization disappeared as much as it has been redefined by an explosion of new methodologies and analytic tools, especially by those who are adherents of critical theory and/or post-modern critique.

While the present-day research is important, a more traditional historical and policy analytical approach can also yield differing insights. Therefore, the conceptual framework for examining the power of Kitsch is drawn from a variety of thinkers, principally Murray Edelman, Charles Lindblom and Edward Woodhouse, and Susanne Langer. This book is particularly concerned with how various symbols and symbolic forms are used politically to shape and limit ways of thinking about the world, and how these ultimately narrow public policy options. The book examines how Kitsch is used in the American political spectacle, how careers can be "made" by selling political Kitsch, and how Kitsch shapes various policy arenas. It concludes with an exploration of resisting and subverting Kitsch, and draws implications for policy formation and policy analysis.

Thanks to free and compulsory schooling, American children learn at a very young age to salute the flag and color pictures of George Washington and his cherry tree. Stories and legends are imparted to children, and emotional connections are carefully built to this ostensibly factual information.[25] The majority of Americans are immersed in Kitsch as children, thanks to the curriculum and practices of public schools coupled with the power of the ever-changing popular culture. From the onset of the 19th century common school, American education and educators have been committed to teaching one "heroic" history, information selected for its moral uplift and capacity to coerce political consensus, rather than for accuracy.[26] While such practices have been lampooned by academics and social commentators since the inception of the common school, the political power of the "Kitsch" curriculum is ever-present in American political debates involving *all* policy areas. Simple-minded popular cultural bromides are invoked across the policy spectrum to justify budget reductions in education, while increasing public spending on incarceration and military defense. Given the perniciousness of Kitsch and the power of the electronic media, it has become very fashionable (culturally popular?) to cut social programs to ribbons in the name of moral uplift. If Edelman is correct that symbolism and spectacle are vital to determining Harold Laswell's question of "who gets what, where and how,"[27] determining how Kitsch plays a political role can lend insights into the policy making process.

NOTES

1. Charles Murray, "The Coming White Underclass," *The Wall Street Journal*, (October 28, 1993), p. A 14.

2. I am using a rather global definition to include all the myriad art forms.

3. Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, (New York, NY: Bell Publishing Company, 1969), p. 3.

4. Murray Edelman, *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 29.

5. Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form*, (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1953), pp. 45–46. As Tomas Kulka writes, "Kitsch cannot afford to be, and hence never is, confusing." See Thomas Kulka, *Ktisch and Art*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 31.

6. Edelman, 1995, p. 7

7. Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

8. Frank Zappa's *Plastic People* is a personal favorite.

9. Langer has a somewhat different notion of the artistic distance from the mundane. See Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form*, (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1953), pp. 45–46.

10. Vitaly Shentalinsky, *Arrested Voices: Resurrecting the Disappeared Writers of the Soviet Regime*, trans. John Crowfoot, (New York: Free Press, 1996).

11. Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 304.

12. As Langer notes, "The more barren and indifferent the symbol, the greater is its semantic power." See Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 75.

13. In an interview with *The Progressive*, social critic (and GM "fan") Michael Moore took dead aim at the blatant political and economic selling out of old rockers. ". . . Bob Seger! Coming from Michigan, it's like Seger and [Ted] Nugent. They were like the two guys, and now look at them. One's a hack for General Motors; the other is running around with the Michigan Militia. I mean, Jesus Christ. I tell you, if I was your age or younger, I'd be so angry at these boomers. Bunch of losers. Take their classic rock and shove it up their ass. That's what I'd do," (p. 42). Scott Dikkers, "Interview with Michael Moore," *The Progressive*, June 1996, Volume 60, Number 6, pp. 40–42. There is a song by the rock band Jethro Tull (from the 1970s) that predicted this phenomenon, *Too Old to Rock and Roll, too Young to Die*.

14. While movies have an enormous cultural influence in the lives of US citizens, I would argue that this is extremely dependent upon television. Very few movie theaters still exist in either the rural US or its inner-cities. However, televisions, VCRs, and more importantly video rental stores, are "everywhere."

15. See Myra MacPherson, *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984); Keith Baker, *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981).

16. This notion of redemption through simplistic nobility is very ancient. See Thucydides's discussion of why Athens lost the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides, *The Complete Writings of Thucydides*,

The Peloponnesian War, (New York: The Modern Library, 1934). For a more contemporary explanation, see Reed Johnson, "Messiahs like Forrest Gump and Nell comfort us with their redemptive simplicity," *Detroit News & Free Press*, December 24, 1994, C, 1:1.

17. Meg Greenfield, "The Bob Newhart Test," *Newsweek*, July 17, 1995, Volume 126, Number 3, p. 66.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Edelman, 1988, p. 8.

20. It is interesting to note just how irrelevant good research can be to the policy making process. For example, President Reagan was known to reject any information out of hand if it contradicted his ideological biases. See Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); and Catherine A. Lugg, *For God and Country: Conservatism and American School Policy* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996). Carol Weiss, and Charles Lindblom and Edward Woodhouse, have made similar findings. See Carol H. Weiss, with Michael J. Bucuvalas, *Social Science Research and Decision-Making*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Charles E. Lindblom and Edward J. Woodhouse, *The Policy-Making Process, 3rd ed.* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1993).

21. See Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964, 1985), pp. 22–43.

22. Fredrick M. Wirt, Michael W. Kirst, *Schools in Conflict: The Politics of Education, 3rd ed.*, (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing, 1992), pp. 43–70.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Dean Jaros, *Socialization to Politics*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 8.

25. Lugg, 1996, pp. 31–35.

26. The most pungent analysis of this kind of educational/political indoctrination is by James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, (New York: New Press, 1995).

27. Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964, 1985); *Political Language: Words that Succeed and Policies that Fail*, (New York: Academic Press, 1977); *Constructing the Political Spectacle*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Kitsch and Social Policy

> Scientific research confirms that welfare benefits to single mothers directly contribute to the rise in illegitimate births. – The Heritage Foundation[1]

There is an assumption, sometimes implied and sometimes explicit, within the mainstream policy literature that "good" policy making and policy implementation should be a rational, scientific and rather bloodless process, ideally conceived and led by political and professional elites.[2] This belief is rooted in the disciplines of social science which guide much of contemporary policy analysis. Like their compatriots residing in the hallowed halls of science, social scientists take pains to appear to be objective, clinical and methodologically rigorous, so their research findings and subsequent policy recommendations are credible to both the general public and, more importantly, policy makers.

Such an assumption is problematic on a number of counts. First, the history of science, social science, and the subsequent policy formations, reveal how vulnerable "empirical fact" can be to capricious cultural and political contexts.[3] Policy analysis and formation, like other human ventures, are subject to very human prejudices. How individuals and groups are classified as medically, socially, politically, and/or morally deviant (and exactly who is "redeemable" or subjected to various "cures") is greatly influenced by the perceptions of those who have the power to construct the categories.[4] As Edelman notes:

> Categorization is necessary to science and, indeed, to all perception. It is also a political tool, establishing status and power hierarchies. We ordinarily assume that a classification scheme is either scientific or political in character, but any category can serve either or both functions, depending upon the interests of those who employ it rather than upon anything inherent in the term.[5]

Second, much of the policymaking within democratic systems has little to do with scientific research or rationality. On the contrary, it has much to do with power, ideology, prejudice, horse trading and good old fashioned "gotcha" politics. Policy makers are politicians and are subject to re-elections, academics are not. Subsequently, politicians need to cultivate loyal constituencies who hold similar world views and goals. They may not be particularly interested in promoting "the larger common good."[6] Academics may pine for and design coherent policy, but politicians need snappy sound-bite policy ideas (such as "ending welfare in our time") to ensure they stay in power. This discussion of Kitsch and public policy now turns to an examine of perhaps two of the most volatile and highly Kitsched areas of social policy: welfare and public education. It concludes with a brief exploration of Kitsch and the politics of policy making.

Hester Prynne and the Politics of Welfare Reform

> She would become the general symbol at which the preacher and moralist might point, and in which they might vivify and embody their images of woman's frailty of sinful passion. Thus the young and pure would be taught to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming on her breast, . . . as the figure, the body, the reality of sin.[7]

One of the most significant accomplishments of the 1996 Congressional session was the retrenchment of the American welfare state. Supporters of federal aid to needy families were stunned by the broad political support for overturning one of the original (but admittedly minor) pillars of the New Deal, Aid to Dependent Children (ACD), which in 1962, became Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Not only is the end of AFDC symptomatic of the fragile health of the sixty year New Deal, but is indicative of the power of one Kitsched icon and how it was manipulated to shape federal policy: Hester Prynne.

Both President Clinton and the Congressional Republicans had promised to "end welfare as we know it," exploiting the historic discomfort Americans have felt regarding poor single mothers. That withering scorn was heaped upon "welfare mothers" was not a particularly new observation. Since the late nineteenth century, poor women with children have been subjected to a level of personal scrutiny by various governmental and social agencies that most other Americans would find intolerable, just to receive meager and grudging assistance.[8] What had changed, however, since the 1960s, was the intensity of societal anger directed at poor women in general, and poor women of color in particular. Inflammatory racial stereotypes, fanned by ambitious politicians and sloppy TV news analysis, transformed welfare "mothers" into "welfare queens," who leeched off the largesse of US taxpayers.[9] Welfare mothers were usually portrayed as young, unwed, African-American, poor, and having children like rabbits. They were seen by more affluent Americans as dangerous and "uncontrollable" women. What happened was that Hester Prynne, the seemingly unrepentant unwed mother had been updated for current political utility to curtail federal aid to the needy.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, US social reformers took up the plight of the single mother. In an era of spectacular economic expansion and shifting gender roles, single mothers (and their children) were viewed as a particularly vexing social problem. Regardless of race, class or ethnicity, these women were typically poor, and far too frequently, desperately so, with limited options regarding employment that managed to be both gainful and legal.[10] Unlike their modern-day counterparts, the vast majority of early twentieth century single mothers were widows, with the second largest category being that of "deserted."[11]

That the overwhelming majority of late nineteenth century/early twentieth century single mothers were widows or deserted wives provided social reformers with a suitable symbol to rally political support around: mother as victim.[12] In an era dominated by the cult of motherhood, of romantic storybook images of home, hearth and family, the daily plight of many single mothers was a stark reminder of far harsher economic and social realities that waited many women and children if their husbands and fathers should die. Social workers and reformers called for government provided "Mothers pensions" for single mothers.[13] But there were important qualifications. Those women receiving aid would have to be proper mothers, housekeepers and exemplars of community moral values.[14] Those who failed in their "motherly duties" lost custody of their children. Ensuring that single mothers were suitably virtuous became part of the larger political agenda of progressive-era reformers. Widows and deserted wives were the deserving poor. Divorcées, women who had children with

more than one man, and never-married mothers, most assuredly were not. As one social scientist described an unfit mother in 1910:

> The mother was sixteen and the father twenty at marriage.... The father died three years ago, and the mother is a miserable, incompetent, degraded woman, ill most of the time, without any moral standards, who, although she has been a widow for three years, has a child thirteen months old.[15]

The most regulated aspect of any women's life was her sexuality. This was true for all American women, but single mothers were subjected to intense personal scrutiny by local social workers and charities who had carte blanche to the most intimate parts of their lives. Single mothers' children were proof enough that they were sexual beings, a discomforting notion for the era's moralists.[16] Subsequently, single mothers by virtue of the social and political status (or more accurately, lack thereof), were by definition, morally suspect.[17]

Progressive-era women were caught on the horns of a particularly cruel paradox. Greater general literacy and scientific advances made birth control possible for many women. Yet the late nineteenth century saw the banning of advertising of birth control and the criminalization of abortion. Access to information regarding reproduction and contraception was restricted under the Comstock Act, which contained harsh penalties for those found in violation.[18] "Proper" women were not to be sexual. Therefore, any "illegitimate" children were proof of a given woman's thoroughly debauched state, and she lost what grudging aid she received. There were also a host of lesser offenses. According to the historian Linda Gordon:

> Illegitimate children or male friends, alcoholic beverages, boarders, or alien methods of housekeeping and child care might disqualify a home. In at least one jurisdiction, eligibility was dependent on the children getting satisfactory school reports. Moralistic and condescending attitudes, and the assumption of supervisory and reforming responsibility characterized mothers' aid designers and administrators (who were sometimes the same). The conviction of superiority inherent in this sense or responsibility was equally a class, ethnic/racial, and religious one. The programs got their start in big cities, which in this period were packed with immigrants, often non-Protestant and non-Anglo-Saxon. Many mothers'-aid advocates hoped to use the promise of pensions as a reward to immigrant and other poor single mothers who allowed themselves to be "Americanized" and otherwise reformed.[19]

The legacy of regulating single mothers found its way into the early federal relief programs which were brought on by the Great Depression and subsequent "New Deal" legislation. Both FERA (Federal Emergency Relief Act – 1933) and ADC (Aid to Dependent Children - 1935), contained humiliating restrictions on mothers' personal lives in order to qualify for meager federal aid. In the case of ADC, these conditions were striking in light that ADC was part of the larger Social Security Act.[20] Unlike single mothers, the elderly and unemployed were spared from such intrusions. Additionally, unlike relief for the elderly and unemployed, ADC depended upon the involvement of the 48 states in funding and administration. While the federal legislation was silent about unmarried or never married mothers,[21] states determined who was eligible to receive benefits, and who was not. This included southern states who weren't particularly sympathetic to the plight of poor African-

American single mothers. Subsequently, "most of the initial ADC beneficiaries were white, widowed women with young children."[22]

Restrictions upon ADC actually increased throughout the 1940s and 1950s, with a good deal of variation in who was deemed to be a suitably moral recipient. Southern states, in particular, used the "morals code" as a means of forcing single African-American mothers into low wage work, "either by excluding them from aid or by giving them lower payments than whites, while threatening to remove them from the rolls altogether if they ... [did] not work."[23] Although ADC was technically available to all citizens who qualified (regardless of race), it was largely a program that provided relief only to white mothers.

It wasn't until the 1960s, when the program was restructured and AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) was born, that the complexion of welfare literally changed. Buttressed by the War on Poverty, millions of families became eligible. Total enrollment shot up from 7.8 million recipients in 1966 to 8.4 million the following year.[24] And the growing political power of African-Americans enabled single black mothers to gain access to federal assistance.[25] That the number of African-American women receiving welfare increased during the 1960s makes a great deal of sense. They were finally able to get the aid.

However, such a change triggered a cultural and political backlash. Welfare, as such, had always been in questionable political odor. With the rise of the "Southern Strategy" during the 1968 presidential campaign, of employing coded racial references to woo white conservative voters, welfare was increasingly viewed as a black program and, by extension, as a social problem in and of itself.[26] This notion was bolstered by reports from Daniel Patrick Moynihan and the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, which noted the rising number of African-American female headed households and then spuriously linked this rise with the urban riots of the era.[27] The conventional wisdom held that here were uncontrollable (and always morally suspect) females who were raising uncontrollable and dangerous children. The image of Hester Prynne had been reinvented for political utility. She was now African-American, and instead of a scarlet "A" emblazoned upon her breast, a scarlet " W " would do quite nicely.

Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s benefits were reduced by both states and the federal government, typically in the name of saving tax dollars while providing moral uplift. A number of more entrepreneurial think-tankers fueled the cost-cutting (Charles Murray and Robert Rector), by claiming welfare actually fostered social pathology (illegitimate children).[28] They charged that benefits paid to unwed single mothers gave perverse incentives for these mothers to have additional children. If both the state and federal government would reduce the benefits, the rates of illegitimacy would fall. Poverty, they argued, would disappear.

President Reagan was particularly sympathetic to this analysis and he did much to popularize the notion that mothers receiving aid were "Welfare Queens." His favorite anecdote was that of a Chicago mother who had "80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cars, and a tax-free income of over $150,000."[29] That Reagan's welfare queen was a myth did nothing to reduce the potency of this time-honored Kitsched symbol. Although, AFDC only accounted for 1 percent of the federal budget,[30] Reagan and other commentators attempted to place the blame for the massive budget deficits on the greedy and probably

irredeemable welfare queen, instead of highly questionable national economic policies. The repackaged Hester Prynne told the lies that many white Americans already half-heatedly believed. They supported reductions in welfare (AFDC) benefits at a time when the national economy was undergoing a massive transformation.[31]

The reduction in benefits were particularly brutal in light of the rising poverty rate for US children. In 1970, 15 percent of children were in poverty, in 1980 the percentage was 18, and by 1993, 22 percent of US children were in poverty.[32] According to sociologists Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, "Nearly three decades of stagnant wages, ineffective child support enforcement, and dwindling welfare benefits have made single mothers and their children America's poorest demographic group."[33] While African-American children were disproportionately affected due to institutionalized racism,[34] all poor children suffered from the cutbacks.

Nevertheless, by the 1990s, given the abundance of racially coded messages and the longevity of the "fallen woman" icon, politicians and commentators from various ideological standpoints attacked welfare. Former (?) Klansman turned Republican party candidate David Duke placed welfare squarely in the midst of his racist rhetoric. Upon his election to the Louisiana legislature, he declared:

> This isn't a victory for me, it was a victory for those who believe in true equal rights for all, not the racial discrimination of affirmative action and minority set-asides. It was a victory for those who choose to work hard rather than abuse welfare. It was a victory for the poor people who want drug dealers and abusers out of the housing projects and away from their children. It was a victory for the hard-pressed taxpayer and homeowner.... It was a victory for the victim rather than the brutal criminal. It was a victory for the young people of Louisiana who demanded the right to attend their own neighborhood schools, to be safe and sound there, and to be educated to the extent of their ability.[35]

Former Governor Bill Clinton was far more coy, declaring that the federal government should promote the values of "work and responsibility."[36] As historian Linda Gordon noted, such rhetoric "scapegoats poor and minority mothers by implying that their problems are caused by laziness and irresponsibility..."[37]

In 1992, Clinton had campaigned for president claiming to be a "New Democrat," and had much success in attacking welfare.[38] Once elected, he didn't do much to change the 60 year-old system, but with the 1994/1995 Republican take-over of the Congress, Clinton was forced to honor his earlier rhetoric. Clinton scuttled away from his initial embrace of activist government (and *Camelot*) and courted the same constituency that had swept the "new" Republicans into office in November 1994. Clinton increasingly drew upon the Kitsched rhetoric of the preacher (see Chapter 2), and repeatedly called for an end to welfare.

Missing from the debates, musings and mutterings over AFDC's fate, was the acknowledgment that it was a small program which had suffered decades of cutbacks. Additionally, most recipients *got off* of welfare in two years.[39] But given the incessant and overheated political rhetoric, actual facts about welfare were given little mention, while misinformation, particularly generated by the conservative think-tanks,[40] got a great deal of political and media play. It was far easier to attack "Hester Prynne" than to confront the growing income gap between rich and poor or the scarcity of jobs for those without college

degrees. By 1995, welfare had escalated into full-blown *moral* issue.[41] To many Americans, those who received welfare had their suspect (read immoral) lifestyles subsidized by those who worked hard and remained virtuous.[42] Thanks to almost 30 years of linking AFDC to racist iconography, welfare "as we know it" came to an end in August 1996. The federal government would no longer guarantee even a basic safety net for those children in poverty.

The "Problem Child," "Child Fixing" and the Politics of US Public Education

> The breakdown of traditional families and the soaring numbers of children who can be classified as "at-risk" have greatly increased the need for building collaborative networks [between public schools and other public agencies] to reduce the risk factors facing many youngsters.[43]

The politics surrounding US public education may well be the favorite contact sport for Americans. Whether the areas involved with public schooling have been personnel, the curriculum or student services, all have been subjected to extensive "tinkering" and, at times, rancorous and hyperventilated political debate. It is important to recognize that what we "know" about public education tends to be a volatile mix of cultural mythology and personal experience. And this "knowledge" is bent and warped by the always shifting political winds. In other words, what we believe we know about public schools tends to be more Kitsched imagery than reality.

Complicating the issue, the public school is the one political institution that most Americans know or believe that we know. For example, more Americans have spent time in a public school than in a voting booth, a crude but telling indicator.[44] This belief that "we know our schools" is both simultaneously correct and mistaken. Most adult Americans spent twelve years of their respective lives going to a supposedly "common" school; learning "reading, writing and arithmetic" among a host of subjects and goals that comprise public education's societal mission.[45] But these same Americans' public educational experiences differed (and continue to differ) greatly along lines of race, class, religion, ethnicity, English language ability, "disability," gender and orientation. In a system of supposedly "common" public schools, just who receives "what" has been largely pre-determined for well over a hundred and fifty years. [46]

Further muddying this picture of the public "school" is the sheer amount of Kitsched mythology surrounding public education, which is taught both within the school and in the larger culture. Part of the US educational mythology claims there was a golden age of American public schooling, where well-behaved and enthusiastic children (read white and Protestant) were taught by competent and caring teachers to embrace a shared vision of Western civilization. According to this mythology,[47] there was a time in the not too distant past when everyone learned their social/cultural/political place, with the public schools efficiently inculcating these time-honored values. Discussions surrounding the purposes and ideals to be taught by public schools were marked by civility, rationality and consensus, with all parties enthusiastically embracing a common "Judeo-Christian" heritage. In other words, the syrupy Kitsched imagery presented in *Little House of the Prairie* (by both the books and the television series) was "real."

The conventional wisdom supports the on-going and powerful ideological attacks on public education: When we (that is, present day grown-ups) were children, we were far better behaved and were much better students than today's miserable and problematic urchins. Additionally, we had better teachers and administrators. Finally, when we were kids, getting a high school diploma actually meant something.[48]

Bolstering this mythology are the myriad of media images: television shows, news accounts, editorials and movies, which all portray "school-life" and "childhood." Much of what is presented to the viewing public tends to be grim. From news portrayals of "wilding" boys,[49] to movies like "Dangerous Minds," children and particularly minority adolescents, are depicted as being problem filled and occasionally threatening. They are a potential menace to the social and political order.[50] The dominant Kitsched image for public education is "what on earth is wrong with these kids today?"

This symbol of the "problem child" is to educational policy as "Hester Prynne" is to welfare policy: an ongoing historical, if dissonant, theme. "Fixing" those "problem children" was a critical argument for the establishment of public or common schools during the mid-1800s. Educational reformer and the secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education (1837–1848), Horrace Mann took his readers to the brink of social Armageddon in pleading for the establishment of a common school.

> The mobs, the riots, the burnings, the lynchings, perpetrated by the men of the present day, are perpetrated because of their vicious and defective education. We see and feel the ravages of their tiger passions now, when they are full grown; but it was years ago when they were whelped and suckled. And so too, if we are derelict in our duty in this matter, our children in their turn will suffer. If we permit the vulture's eggs to be hatched, it will then be too late to take care of the lambs.[51]

Mann's strongly stated beliefs that a common school would provide the glue to build social stability resonated with many Americans of the ante-bellum era. According to Mann's vision, the schools would properly train children in the ways of industry and thrift, and through intensive social interaction, children would learn to respect each other. Mann believed that only in a common school, where children of all religious and class backgrounds could be educated side-by-side, would the foundations for social stability be established. The common schools were to be the "panacea" for society's ills.[52] As he wrote in 1848:

> It knows no distinction of rich and poor, of bond and free, or between those who, in the imperfect light of this world, are seeking, through different avenues, to reach the gate of heaven. Without money and without price, it throws open its doors, and spreads the table of its bounty, for all the children of the State. Like the sun, it shines, not only upon the good, but upon the evil, that they may become good; and, like the rain, its blessings descend, not only upon the just, but upon the unjust, that their injustice may depart from them and be known no more.[53]

Additionally, the "common school" was to be a Christian institution, for many nineteenth century Americans equated morality with Protestant Christianity, not necessarily the same thing. Yet, in deference to Constitutional (and more importantly, political) matters, the public school was to be non-denominational. In Mann's common school, Bible verses were to be read without comment.[54] The inclusion of the Bible infuriated Catholics and some of the more Orthodox Protestants who correctly viewed such vaguely touted "Protestantism"

as courting Protestant political support for the publicly funded schools without alienating any specific Protestant denomination. The overly Protestant nature of the public schools was also a means of "fixing" the growing numbers of Catholic children who were seen as a major problem for the Protestant majority.[55]

The need to fix children took on greater importance after the Civil War as massive immigration transformed the American social, political and economic landscape. It also forever changed the "common school." For the first time in American history, non-Angloes dominated some of the larger urban centers.[56] The demographic shift was perceived as a threat to the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) economic, political and social order.[57] As the Dean of Stanford University's School of Education , Ellwood P. Cubberley, remarked in 1919:

> These Southern and Eastern Europeans were of a very different type from the North and West Europeans who preceded them. Largely illiterate, docile, lacking in initiative, and almost wholly without the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, liberty, law, order, public decency, and government, their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock and to weaken and corrupt our political life. Settling largely in the cities of the North, the agricultural regions of the Middle and the Far West, and the mining districts of the mountain regions, they have created serious problems in housing and living, moral and sanitary conditions, and honest and decent government, while popular education has everywhere been made more difficult by their presence.
>
> The new peoples, and especially those from the South and East of Europe, have come so fast that we have been unable to absorb and assimilate them, and our national life, for the past quarter of a century, has been afflicted with a serious case of racial indigestion.[58]

One obvious social antacid was the public school,[59] and it was restructured to cope with these three profound social changes (i.e. fix "those" kids). Compulsory education laws coupled with the dramatic increase in the school-aged population swelled school enrollments.[60] Many urban areas developed new schools, such as the comprehensive high school and night school to cope with the demand. Since administrators' and teachers' (and, in fact, parents) expected that many of the children would soon be working in factories, schools were modeled after factories complete with bells to signal the start and end of classes. Desks bolted to the floor to maintain straight rows and facilitate a sense of order. Schools were where children (especially immigrant children) would be assimilated or *Americanized* into the great social/political melting pot. They would learn English, American history and the "fine" Anglo-Saxon cultural norms. Additionally, it was important that children (as future workers) learn to be obedient, orderly, mannerly and docile, for the captains of the new industrial order demanded nothing less from public schools supported by their tax dollars.[61] As historian Henry Perkinson observed:

> For their own sake and for the good of society the younger generation had to be constrained. The very stability of democratic society depended upon their being adjusted to the American way of life. Such adjustment required a long period of careful training. There, in order to preserve American democracy the city children had to be institutionalized, had to be compelled to attend school.[62]

The public school became society's great selecting and sorting machine, equipping (fixing?) children for their eventual social, economic and political roles.[63] The ideal of a "common" education for all children was swept away, viewed as socially and economically inefficient. Standardized testing and curricular tracking became fashionable as "child fixing" was transformed into a more "scientific" enterprise. Both were employed to efficiently (read cheaply) select and sort students into their "proper" vocational and/or academic curricular program. That these practices reinforced the inequitable status quo was seen as socially beneficial. As one commentator of the era noted, it was "foolish to educate each child to be President of the United States,"[64] stressing that inequalities were natural, and schools should "give each layer its own appropriate form of schooling."[65]

But there were problems with these new "scientific measures," particularly with the cultural, ethnic, racial and gender biases embedded in the tests. For example, one promoter, Carl Bringham, examined the results of various intelligence tests and found that "Nordic groups were intellectually superior to Alpine and Mediterranean groups, Alpines were superior to Mediterraneans, and Mediterraneans were superior to Negroes."[66] By ascribing intellectual and academic merit (or lack thereof) to class, racial, religious, gender, and ethnic characteristics, the principal value of the early standardized tests was in strengthening the established social hierarchy (White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, male, with money) during a time of on-going social and economic flux.

Yet the impulse to "fix children" also led to honest social reforms, both outside and within the school's walls. During this era, crusading newspaper journalists, known as muck-rakers, depicted the dismal conditions in which many urban children lived. The problems faced by children were very real, although the problems ascribed as intrinsic to these same children were socialy constructed. For example, Jacob Riis's 1890 *How the Other Half Lives*, gave the horrific details of life (and death) in New York City tenements.

> Newspaper readers will recall the story told little more than a year ago, of a boy who after carrying beer a whole day for a shopful of men over on the East Side, where his father worked, crept into the cellar to sleep off the effects of his own share in the rioting. It was Saturday evening. Sunday his parents sought him high and low; but it was not until Monday morning, when the shop was opened, that he was found, killed and half-eaten by the rats that overran the place.[67]

In response to the growing urban decay, city school districts pioneered school-lunch programs, added playgrounds, built gyms and shower facilities, and hired school nurses. Child labor laws were passed, and in some instances, actually enforced.[68] Additionally, various private and public "child saving" agencies were established, all dedicated to improving the lives of poor children.

These measures were seen as ameliorating the effects of brutal poverty upon the lives of children, without challenging their foundations, which lay in the political and economic order.[69] As in the case of welfare for single mothers, such aid came with the attendant social regulation and close monitoring. A.B. Hollingshead, in his classic study *Elmtown's Youth*, documented just how tightly poor children were monitored in the public school.[70] Poor children, like poor mothers, would repeatedly have to prove their "worth" in receiving such munificence.

The need to regulate children, particularly poor boys and their middle-class playmates, was bolstered by popular media, advice columnists, and the academic community. According to historian David Nasaw, between 1901 and 1910:

> Every one of the popular magazines ran its articles on these subjects: *Scribners* published, "are we spoiling our boys who have the best chances in life?"; *Popular Science*, "Difficult boys"; *The American Mercury*, "Helpless youths and useless men"; *Outlook*, "Getting at the boys," "Being a boy," and "Managing a boy"; *Lippincott's*, "Moulding of Men"; *Harper's Bazaar*, "Play suits for little boys" and "Please for the small boy"; and *Ladies Home Journal*, the most influential of all the popular magazines and the first to exceed a million in circulation, "Bad boy of the street," "How and when to be frank with boys," "How I trained my boys to be gentlemen," How we trained our boy," Keeping a city boy straight," and "What boys my boy should play with."[71]

Social commentators, psychologists and parents all agreed that children were passion driven creatures, in need of a firm parental hand. Girls too, were in need of strict supervision. As one advice book counseled in 1900:

> Nobody who has to do with a girl of fifteen but has observed her recklessness as to wraps, her fondness for bonbons, her indifference to overshoes and thick boots. Here is the bread and butter age, when she scorns precautions and is averse to the whole machinery of prudence. With a fatal facility she picks up and adopts the college slang of her brothers, or the more objectionable catch-words of the street. She needs constant reminders of her duty to her mother-tongue even when her home associations are ideal.[72]

The public school was seen as a critical (but not the only) social agency that could strengthen the shaky parental hand. Extra-curricular activities and carefully structured curricular activities were seen as vehicles to channel dangerous childhood passions.

The anxieties of the era were captured (and insipidly caricatured) in Meredith Wilson's "The Music Man." Substituting "River City" for Mason City, Iowa (Wilson's beloved home town) in the song "We've got Trouble," the town is whipped into a frenzy by a con man posing as a band director, who sees massive juvenile pathology (i.e. problem boys) is just around the corner.

> Chorus: Oh we got trouble
> Right here in River City.
> It starts with P
> Which rhymes with T
> and that stands for POOL![73]

The "trouble" envisioned by the nervous residents are all the possible "rotten outcomes" wrought by the opening of a pool hall in the mythical River City. The panacea is to establish an instrumental music program (i.e. band), or at least, have the parents of the town buy band instruments and uniforms for their supposedly "at-risk" boys.[74]

"The Music Man" is actually a late 1950s Kitsched version of the US at the turn of the century. River City is portrayed as a bastion of "traditional" values, with little social, political or economic dissent, and everyone knows "their place," especially the children. The story is complete with a syrupy Hollywood ending–the con man is caught, redeemed and he

even "gets the girl." Nevertheless, corny and contrived as the musical is, the show does spoof the cultural notions of "child fixing" and the "problem child."

The notion of children as dangerous "others" in need of "fixing" is a continuous and discordant theme to the present day. Since the 1950s, one can site a host of manifestations in both the popular culture (movies such as *Rebel Without A Cause*, *Home Alone*, and, of course, *Problem Child*),[75] and various legislative remedies targeting public schools as the panacea (such as the National Defense Education Act, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Goals 2000).[76] While the legislative initiatives have been touted as enhancing military preparedness, social stability and economic competitiveness (respectively) through public education, each held a component of child fixing.

It should also be noted that some children are perceived as more in need of the "fix" than others, and that in practice, not all fixes are equal. One only need consider the disproportionate number of African American students placed in special education courses to understand that "help" is highly context dependent.[77] Although the intent of public schooling is both ameliorative and facillitative (fixing children and helping them grow), they are, by design, remarkably adept at reproducing the inequities within the large social order. Thanks to the vast social classes differences, massive residential segregation, biases within standardized educational measures, and teacher and administrator expectations, the determination of which children receive what education, is largely influenced by the individual student's race, socio-economic class, ethnicity, and gender. [78]

The political Kitsch surrounding US public education helps solidify the inequitable outcomes, by reinforcing the belief that public schools are "fair arbiters" in selecting and sorting students, particularly those children historically seen as needing "the fix." Hence, many educational reform proponents can take the supposed moral high ground, by advocating for curriculum frameworks, alignment of state education policies, and a restructured governance system,[79] to improve educational outcomes for all students (particularly poor and minority children), while ignoring that many of these same students attend racial and economically segregated public schools. That US public schools have largely resegregated since 1969, escapes notice.[80] Contemporary reformers have accepted the old notion that separate public schools are equal schools, something that the US Supreme Court found to be inherently unequal in 1954.

Ironically, many of the current and rather "mushy" educational reforms[81] bandied about invite attack from the political right, as they aren't "Kitschy" enough. In the US, the Kitsched symbol of the problem child meets the Kitsched symbol of the "old-timey" happy school, best represented by *Little House on the Prairie*. Proposals that fail to have more than a whiff of "old-time traditional values" (school prayer, rigid discipline, Anglicization of "other" students, hyperventilated competition--excellence) are pilloried. It should be noted that the political right revels in educational kitsch. Much the right's rhetoric and educational reform proposals are rooted in the *Jeremiad*. Like the biblical prophet Jeremiah, the right thunders about all "those" problem children running amuck and then attacks the public schools for failing miserably in their redemptive "child fixing" mission. It is an easy cultural dance for conservative activists to twist the rhetoric of the "preacher" and employ the basic symbols of social traditionalism to propel their educational agenda (see Chapter 2).

The most famous (and embarrassing) example of right-wing Kitsch was repeated by pundits William Bennett, George Will and Rush Limbaugh. According to former conservative Michael Lind:

> In 1994, the press in the United States was suddenly full of references to two lists of behavior banned in public schools, one from the 1940s and the other from the 1980s. In the 1940s, it was said, 'the [top] problems were: (1) talking; (2) chewing gum; (3) making noise; (4) running in the halls; (5) getting out of turn in line; (6) wearing improper clothing; (7) not putting paper in wastebaskets.' In the 1980s, however, the major problems were '(1) drug abuse; (2) alcohol abuse; (3) pregnancy; (4) suicide; (5) rape; (6) robbery, (7) assault....[82]

The media-hyped lists were actually the brainchild of highly questionable parentage. T. Cullen Davis, a fundamentalist Christian from Forth Worth, Texas, with a history of attacking public schools, generated the lists out of whole cloth (i.e. he told a really big lie). But the fact that the lists were given instant credibility, by both conservative pundits and the mainstream media, is indicative of the on-going power of Kitsch in shaping educational discourse.

Most Americans still believe that most public schools (particularly urban schools) are dangerous places, filled with problem children in need of the pedagogical the fix. As with welfare policies and practices, that so many US children are in desperate need of aid helps to legitimize both progressive and highly coercive and punitive educational practices. This leads to what educational researcher Richard Brosio describes as the "Janus-faced public schools:" The public school system promises to inculcate the fruits of democracy to all Americans while largely reproducing the inequitable status quo.[83] And the pervasiveness of Kitsch helps to reinforce the perception that the game is ultimately "fair" since most Americans have been through the "system."

For educational and welfare policy analysts, the power of Kitsch in shaping policy can be both horrifying and seductive. The "problem child" and "Hester Prynne" are both powerful cultural constructions which greatly limit policy options in while providing political reassurance that various analyses, proposals and policies are congruent with the broader culture. This is not surprising. As Lindblom and Woodhouse observed:

> Professional policy analysis tends to end up supporting the existing social order and its prevailing distribution of privileges and deprivations. Policy professionals, like all social, physical, and biological scientists, become dependent on elite grants, take employment with elites, seek acceptance by elites, identify with elites.[84]

There are very few rewards, monetary, professional or social, for those who stray from the Kitsched yellow brick policy road and still wish to be considered "elite."

Yet, there are compelling reasons for straying. As Lindblom and Woodhouse lamented, "Policy outcomes too often are bizarre or monstrous–over one trillion dollars expended just in the 1980s on suicidal nuclear weaponry, medical costs escalating out of control, an energy non-policy allowing depletion of scare fossil fuels while warming climate and creating acid rain."[85] The ability for policy analysts and policy makers to distinguish what is "Kitsch" and what is "real" may just lead to less surreal policy making.

NOTES

1. As quoted by Randy Albelda, Nancy Folbre & The Center for Popular Economics, *The War on the Poor: A Defense Manual*, (New York: The New Press, 1996), p. 42.

2. For example, see Susan H. Fuhrman's "The Politics of Coherence," in *Designing Coherent Education Policy: Improving the System*, Susan H. Fuhrman, ed. (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1993), pp. 1- 34. As Lindblom and Woodhouse note, this deference to elites in policy analysis is deeply problematic for democracies. See Charles E. Lindblom and Edward J. Woodhouse, *The Policy-Making Process, 3rd ed.* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1993), p. 9.

3. Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 19 - 50; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1978); Pat Shipman, *The Evolution of Racism: Human Differences and the Use and Abuse of Science* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Clinton B. Allison, *Present and Past: Essays for Teachers in the History of Education*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1995). For a horrifying example of the potentially abusive and deadly consequences of "disinterested" policy research, see Claudia Clark, *Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910-1935*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

4. Murray Edelman, "The Political Language of the Helping Professions," *Politics and Society*, Volume 4, Number 3, pp. 295-310.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

6. This is painfully evident regarding the politics of public school finance in New Jersey. "The New Jersey case is particularly revealing because many of the participants in the public debate felt no sense of shame as they argued to maintain an inherently unequal system of public education which public money was used to confer private privilege to students in the well-appointed suburban schools while basic health and safety standards re routinely violated in their underfinanced urban counterparts." See William A. Firestone, Margaret E. Goertz, and Gary Natriello, *From Cashbox to Classroom: The Struggle for Fiscal Reform and Educational Change in New Jersey*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), p. 159.

7. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 79.

8. Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and A History of Welfare* (New York: The Press, 1994).

9. Jill Quadagno makes precisely this point. See Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997), pp. 4 -- 5.

10. Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence*, (New York: Viking, 1988), pp. 87-88.

11. Gordon, 1994, pp. 19 - 23.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 15 - 35. See also Gordon, (1988), pp. 82 - 115.

13. Prior to the passage of the Social Security Act, the largest federal program for single mothers, provided benefits to widows of Civil War Veterans (USA not CSA). See Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1992).

14. Gordon, 1988; Gordon, 1994 ; Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992). Like other single mothers receiving assistance, Civil War widows had to be "proper" women. "From the time of the war, pension applicants were allowed to testify for themselves or find their own witnesses in support of their applications; for example, neighbors might testify to a woman's marriage to a dead soldier, and to her persistent widowed status and proper sexual conduct after his death." See Skocpol, p. 118.

15. Gordon, (1994), pp. 15–16, quoting Sophonisba Preston Breckinridge, "Neglected Widowhood in the Juvenile Court," *American Journal of Sociology*, 16 (July 10), p. 87.

16. Female public school teachers were routinely fired upon their marriage, precisely because of the diminished moral status as caretakers of the public's young children. See Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642-1993, 3rd edition*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993).

17. Edelman, (1974), p. 299.

18. Coontz, pp. 110-111.

19. Gordon, (1994), p. 46.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 253-254. See also Quadagno, pp. 119 – 120, *Frances Fox Piven & Richard Cloward, Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare, Updated Ed.*, (New York: Vintage Press, 1993), pp. 114–117.

21. Gordon, (1994), p. 281.

22. Quadagno, p. 119.

23. Piven & Cloward, p. 141.

24. Quadango, p. 121.

25. Piven & Cloward, p. 222.

26. Quadango, p. 127. See also Linda Gordon, "How 'Welfare' Become a Dirty Word," in The War on the Poor, (1996) p. 110.

27. In an odd twist of history, President Bush blamed the 1992 Los Angels riots upon the Great Society programs, a laughable premise. "An astonished Bill Clinton, his Democratic rival in the 1992 president race, scornfully asked why Bush had to return to the 1960s to find a scapegoat when the Republicans had held the presidency for 20 of the last 24 years." See Quadango, p. 3. Like many of the urban riots of the 1960s, the L.A. rebellion had more to do the with on-going police brutality of the African-American community, than with the parenting practices of poor single mothers.

28. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy*, (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Robert Rector, *FYI :Heritage Foundation Newsletter*, February 9, 1995, (Washington, DC: Author) . Michael Lind presents a critique of Murray's "research" in *Up From Conservatism: Why the Right is Wrong for America*, (New York: Free Press, 1996), pp. 181–183.

29. Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), p. 148.

30. Frances Fox Piven, "Welfare & the Transformation of Electoral Politics," *Dissent*, Fall 1996, p. 62. The budget deficits of the 1980s had far more to do with the massive spending spree on the military coupled with an irresponsible tax-cuts and nasty recession. See also David Stockman, *The Triumph of Politics: How the Reagan Revolution Failed*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986); Kevin

Phillips, *The Politics of Rich and Poor: Wealth and the American Electorate in the Reagan Aftermath* (New York: Random House, 1990).

31. Laura D'Andrea Tyson, *The U.S. and the world economy in transition*. The Berkeley Roundtable on the International Economy, University of California, Berkeley. BRIE Working Paper #22. (July 1986). Paper prepared for the meeting of the Western Economics Association, Berkeley, CA.

32. Albelda, Folbre and the Center for Popular Economics, p. 27.

33. Edin and Lein, p. 4.

34. Albelda, Folbre and the Center for Popular Economics, pp. 26-27; Coontz, pp. 82–86.

35. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction, and Democracy*, (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 86.

36. Linda Gordon, "How 'Welfare' Became a Dirty Word, in *The War on the Poor: A Defense Manual*, Randy Albelda, Nancy Folbre & The Center for Popular Economics, (New York: The New Press, 1996), p. 111.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pp. 416-418.

39. Randy Albelda, Nancy Folbre & The Center for Popular Economics, p. 60.

40. Piven, pp. 64–65.

41. Drew, pp. 416–418; Piven, pp. 65–66.

42. Pivin, p. 66.

43. Catherine A. Lugg and William Lowe Boyd, "Leadership for Collaboration: Reducing Risk and Fostering Resilience," *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 1993, Volume 75, Number 3, p. 254.

44. David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

45. David F. Labaree, "Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals, *American Educational Research Journal*, Spring, 1997, Volume 34, Number 1, pp. 39-81.

46. There is an enormous body of research which explores the various historical, structural and persistent inequities embedded within US public education. The latest and perhaps most poignant examination is by Jean Anyon. See Anyon, *Ghetto Schooling: A Political Economy of Urban Educational Reform*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).

47. Barbara Finklestein, "Education Historians as Mythmakers," *Review of Research in Education*, Gerald Grant, Ed., (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1992), pp. 255-297.

48. The most biting and data driven critique of the myriad of ideological attacks is by David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud and the Attack on America's Public Schools*. (New York: Addison-Welsey Publishing, Company, 1996).

49. See Stephanie Coontz, (1992), pp. 232-254.

50. Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe, "Introduction: No More Secrets–Kinderculture, Information Saturation, and the Postmodern Childhood," in *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*, Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe, (eds.), (Boulder: Westview Books, 1997), pp. 1–30.

51. Clarence J. Karier, *The Individual, Society, and Education: A History of American Educational Ideas, 2nd edition.*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 60.

52. Henry J. Perkinson, *The Imperfect Panacea: American Faith in Education, 1865 - 1990*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991).

53. S. Alexander Rippa, *Educational ideas in America: A documentary history*. (New York: David McKay, 1969), p. 204.

54. David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Mangers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982). See also Karier.

55. David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: The American Far Right from Nativism to the Militia Movement*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 56; Allison, pp. 8–11.

56. Bennett, pp. 159–182.

57. David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Allison, pp. 103–107.

58. Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Education History*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1919), p. 338.

59. Catherine A. Lugg, "Attacking affirmative action: Social Darwinism as public PRolicy," in *Measured Lies: The "Bell Curve" Examined*, Joe Kincheloe, Shirley Steinberg, Aaron D. Gresson, III, (eds). (New York: St. Martin's, 1996), pp.? .

60. Perkinson, pp. 69–76; See also Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Lawrence A. Cremin, *Popular Education and Its Discontents*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

61. David Nasaw, *School to Order: A Social History of Public Schooling in the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 87–104.

62. Perkinson, p. 69; see also Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*, (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

63. Tyack; Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642-1993, 3rd Edition*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994).

64. Tyack, p. 129.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Spring, p. 1994, p. 264; see also Pat Shipman, *The Evolution of Racism: Human Differences and the Use and Abuse of Science*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

67. Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), p. 162. Originally published in 1890 and viewed as a Progressive-era classic, Riis's book reflects the ethnocentrism, and religious and racial bigotry of the era. As Donald Bigelow writes in the introduction . . . "one reads that Negroes are 'sensual,' Germans 'thrifty,' and Italians, 'swarth.' The author places a great deal of emphasis on the fact that the Chinese are clean but gamblers and that all

attempts to make 'an effecitive Christian of John Chinaman will remain abortive.' As for Jews, he says in many variations that 'money is their God.'" See page xiii.

68. Although laws restricting the employment of children were passed by several states at the turn of the century, they were not enforced with much enthusiasm until the Great Depression. See Gordon, 1994.

69. Bowles & Gintis; see also Richard A. Brosio, *A Radical Democratic Critique of Capitalist Education*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1994); Ricka Shpak Lissak, *Pluralism & Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890-1919*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), Nasaw, pp. 96-98.

70. A.B. Hollingshead, *Elmstown's Youth*, (New York: John Wiley, 1949).

71. Nasaw, p. 90.

72. Margaret E. Sangster, *Winsome Womanhood*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1900), p. 24.

73. The author, as a former musician, has played in the pit for that specific show, complete with "Marian the tone-deaf librarian." Additionally, when living in Iowa, I worked, BRIEFLY, for a tenor saxophone band [Ralph Zarnow and his big band], arranging unpublished Wilson sketches. I was not, and am not, a fan of Wilson's music, although he is much beloved by state residents. The town of Mason City, Iowa, is currently raising money for "A Music Man" square in honor of Wilson.

74. According to a popular music education legend the Conn Musical Instrument company once sold coronets with the following marketing pitch "If Johnny blows a coronet he won't blow a safe," ca. 1912.

75. See Joe Kincheloe's "'Home Alone' and 'Bad to the Bone': The Advent of a Postmodern Childhood," ," in *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*, Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe, (eds.), (Boulder: Westview Books, 1997), pp. 31–52.

76. For example, a section of the much maligned *Goals 2000, Educate American Act*, contained a provision for mid-night basketball: The intent was targeted at child fixing: "The program shall be designed to serve primarily youths and young adults from a neighborhood or community whose population has not less than 2 of the following characteristics (in comparison with national averages):

> '(i) A substantial problem regarding use or sale of illegal drugs.
>
> '(ii) A high incidence of crimes committed by youths or young adults.
>
> '(iii) A high incidence of persons infected with the human immunodeficiency virus or sexually transmitted diseases.
>
> '(iv) A high incidence of pregnancy or a high birth rate, among adolescents.
>
> '(v) A high unemployment rate for youths and young adults.
>
> '(vi) A high rate of high school drop-outs.'"

From http://www.ED.gov./legislation/GOALS2000/TheAct/ (March 23, 1998). This section did not survive later Congressional budget cutting.

77. This tradition was neatly satirized in John Walters' 1988 film "Hairspray."

78. Bowles and Gintis, pp. 48–49. See also Gary Orfield, "Unxepected Costs and Uncertain gains of Dismantling Desegregation," in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton (eds.), (New York: The New Press, 1996), pp. 73–114; Berliner & Biddle, pp. 215-279.

79. Jennifer A. O'Day and Marshall S. Smith, "Systemic Reform and Educational Opportunity," in *Designing Coherent Education Policy: Improving the System*, Susan H. Fuhrman, (ed.). (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993), pp. 251-312.

80. A point made repeatedly by Orfield & Eaton.

81. Neither Gary Orfield, nor David Berliner and Bruce Biddle see the contemporary reform movement as capable of addressing the very real ills within US public education. See Orfield, "Toward an Integrated Future," in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*, Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton (eds.), (New York: The New Press, 1996), pp. 331–361; and Berliner and Biddle, pp. 172–214.

82. Michael Lind, *Up From Conservatism: Why the Right Is Wrong for America*, (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 164.

83. Brosio, pp. 1–43.

84. Charles E. Lindblom and Edward J. Woodhouse, *The Policy-Making Process, 3rd. ed.* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1993), p. 135.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

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